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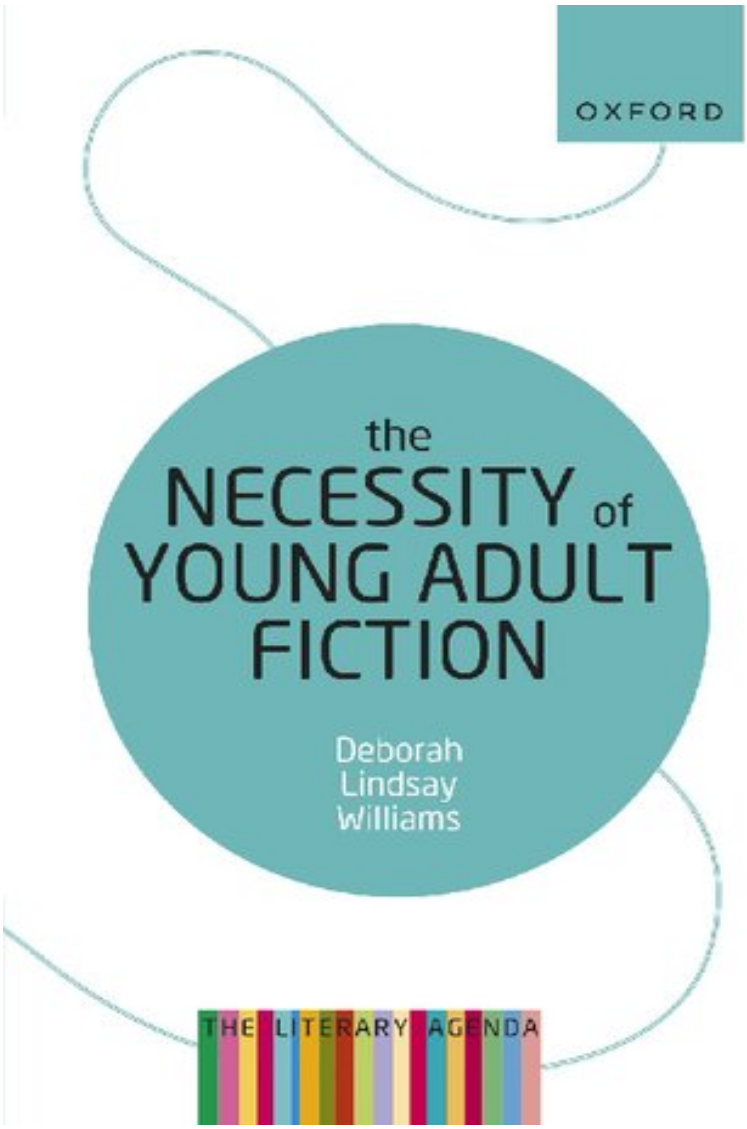


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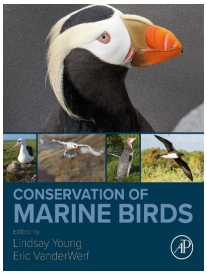


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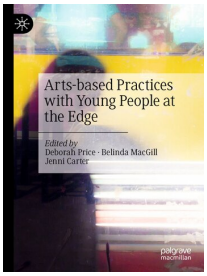


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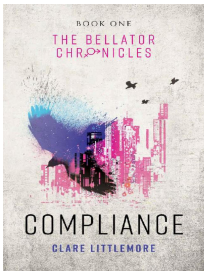


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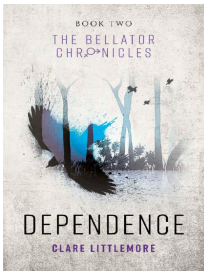

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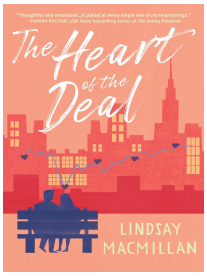


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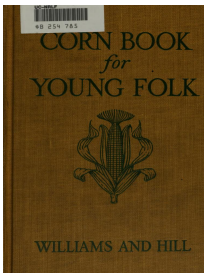


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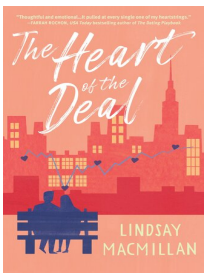

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# the NECESSITY of YOUNG ADULT FICTION

Deborah Lindsay Williams

THE LITERARY AGENDA

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DEBORAH LINDSAY WILLIAMS

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# Series Introduction

The Crisis in, the Threat to, the Plight of the Humanities: enter these phrases in Google's search engine and there are twenty-three million results, in a great fifty-year-long cry of distress, outrage, fear, and melancholy. Grant, even, that every single anxiety and complaint in that catalog of woe is fully justified—the lack of public support for the arts, the cutbacks in government funding for the humanities, the imminent transformation of a literary and verbal culture by visual/virtual/digital media, the decline of reading . . . And still, though it were all true, and just because it might be, there would remain the problem of the response itself. Too often there's recourse to the shrill moan of offended piety or a defeatist withdrawal into professionalism.

*The Literary Agenda* is a series of short polemical monographs that believes there is a great deal that needs to be said about the state of literary education inside schools and universities and more fundamentally about the importance of literature and of reading in the wider world. The category of "the literary" has always been contentious. What *is* clear, however, is that increasingly it is dismissed or unrecognized as a way of thinking or an arena for thought. It is skeptically challenged from within, for example, by the sometimes rival claims of cultural history, contextualized explanation, or media studies. It is shaken from without by even greater pressures: by economic exigency and the severe social attitudes that can follow from it; by technological change that may leave the traditional forms of serious human communication looking merely antiquated. For just these reasons, this is the right time for renewal, to start reinvigorated work into the meaning and value of literary reading for the sake of the future.

It is certainly no time to retreat within institutional walls. For all the academic resistance to "instrumentalism," to governmental measurements of public impact and practical utility, literature exists in and across society. The "literary" is not pure or specialized or self-confined; it is not restricted to the practitioner in writing or the academic in studying. It exists in the whole range of the world which is its subject matter: It consists in what non-writers actively receive from

writings when, for example, they start to see the world more imaginatively as a result of reading novels and begin to think more carefully about human personality. It comes from literature making available much of human life that would not otherwise be existent to thought or recognizable as knowledge. If it is true that involvement in literature, so far from being a minority aesthetic, represents a significant contribution to the life of human thought, then that idea has to be argued at the public level without succumbing to a hollow rhetoric or bowing to a reductive world-view. Hence the effort of this series to take its place *between* literature and the world. The double-sided commitment to occupying that place and establishing its reality is the only "agenda" here, without further prescription as to what should then be thought or done within it.

What is at stake is not simply some defensive or apologetic "justification" in the abstract. The case as to why literature matters in the world not only has to be argued conceptually and strongly tested by thought, but it should be given presence, performed and brought to life in the way that literature itself does. That is why this series includes the writers themselves, the novelists and poets, in order to try to close the gap between the thinking of the artists and the thinking of those who read and study them. It is why it also involves other kinds of thinkers—the philosopher, the theologian, the psychologist, the neuroscientist—examining the role of literature within their own life's work and thought, and the effect of that work, in turn, upon literary thinking. This series admits and encourages personal voices in an unpredictable variety of individual approaches and expressions, speaking wherever possible across countries and disciplines and temperaments. It aims for something more than intellectual assent: rather the literary sense of what it is like to feel the thought, to embody an idea in a person, to bring it to being in a narrative or in aid of adventurous reflection. If the artists refer to their own works, if other thinkers return to ideas that have marked much of their working life, that is not their vanity nor a failure of originality. It is what the series has asked of them: to speak out of what they know and care about, in whatever language can best serve their most serious thinking, and without the necessity of trying to cover every issue or meet every objection in each volume.

Philip Davis

# Acknowledgments

A long time ago, when I worked at Iona College, a group of students begged me to "teach a *Harry Potter* class." It was long enough ago, in fact, that J. K. Rowling hadn't even finished the series, much less become infamous for her remarks about trans people. Putting together that course, and listening to the way the students engaged with Harry and the other young adult books on the syllabus, marked the beginning of my scholarly interest in YA literature.

My thinking about YA literature intersected with my thinking about cosmopolitanism when I started teaching at NYU Abu Dhabi (NYUAD), a four-year liberal arts university with students who come from almost every country in the world. The *Harry Potter* course became "Myth, Magic, and Representations of Childhood," and the conversations that occurred over the decade that I taught that course have shaped the ideas that are at the core of this book. I am grateful to all the students who have shared their insights with me—and although a full list is beyond the scope of these pages, I want to make sure to mention Aishah Shafiq, Zoe Patterson, Dominique Lear, Nikolaj Nielsen, Amrita Anand, Malak Abdel-Ghaffar, Rabha Ashry, Gabrielle Flores, Viviana Kawas, and Jamie Sutherland.

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The proposal for this book, and much of the manuscript, was written during the early years of the pandemic. During that dark time, when the world was sealed off from itself, I was lucky enough to be in conversation with some of my marvelous colleagues at NYUAD: the "Pod"—Shamoon Zamir, Marzia Balzani, Matty Silverstein, and Roberta Wertman. Scholarship alone cannot sustain us: we need friendship, laughter, and the occasional stiff drink to thrive. The Pod has provided all of these things, and more. I am grateful to Justin Stearns and Nathalie Peutz for the many impromptu and thought-provoking conversations about climate change, YA fiction, and teaching. A debt also to Shireen RK Patell, who read and commented on an early version of this manuscript. My decades-long conversation with Marion Wrenn about writing, teaching, and life have helped shaped my thinking about this book–and everything else.

I am writing these acknowledgments in the sad aftermath of my colleague Ken Nielsen's sudden and untimely death, and it is to him that I owe a profound debt. His incisive wit and compassionate intelligence, as well as his fierce devotion to queer and marginalized people, create a formidable legacy, one that I strive to honor every time I step into a classroom or talk with a student. His friendship remains one of the great gifts of my life.

There must also be thanks given to my family, who made sure I felt their love across the many time zones that separated the U.S. and Abu Dhabi, where I was living while I wrote this book.

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My sons, Liam and Caleb, are now themselves young adults, launching themselves into this uncertain and complicated world. This book is dedicated to them, in love and hope.

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# Introduction: Why "Kids' Books?"

"No wonder your course is so popular," said a colleague. "It's a course on *kids' books*." His voice dripped with disdain. He didn't come right out and call me a panderer, but it was implied: Kids' lit, in his mind, was not a serious endeavor and *certainly* not a subject for university students. The class is actually about young adult literature, but to my colleague it's all the same thing, and neither is an appropriate subject for college students. As is often the case when someone says something ungenerous, I didn't have a ready response. What I wish I'd said is that he should be glad that I'm teaching these books because without "kids' books," there'd be no readers; and without readers, there'd be no writers, and probably far fewer students with an interest in the "serious" adult books that he teaches.

My colleague's dismissive comment is not unusual, despite the steady rise in children's literature as a focus of scholarship. There are numerous refereed journals, professional organizations, and academic publishers with children's literature imprints; scores of dissertations are written every year in the United States and the United Kingdom that center on some aspect of children's literature (including in the fields of library science, education and pedagogy, publishing, and marketing). And yet somehow "children's literature" is seen as peripheral, not as important as literature written for grown-ups, even though children's literature is the only category of literature that can accurately be described as universal: We have all of us been children and teenagers, which means we have all been, at some point, the target audience for these books. As teenagers, when we find ourselves in books, it seems to resonate more powerfully than when we have those flickers of recognition in our adult reading. A student of mine who grew up between Seoul and Los Angeles found that resonance in Nnedi Okorafor's *Akata Witch* (2011), which is about a Nigerian girl who grows up in New York and is teased for her accent, and then moves to Aba, in Nigeria, where she is also teased for her accent. "That's *me*," said the student with great joy. "I didn't

talk the right way no matter where I was—and so I kinda stopped talking in public for a while." Children's literature, like all reading, helps us to connect with ourselves, to deepen our understanding of our own experiences—and it also establishes connections across difference that we might not otherwise expect, in part because we are conditioned to think more about difference than we are about connection. Why would we imagine, for example, that a Korean college kid would identify with a Nigerian "tween"?

Talking about "children's literature" sets up several problems of definition, not the least of which is the question of "category." Children's literature encompasses all genres and forms: picture books, chapter books for early readers, young adult (YA) books; speculative fiction and nonfiction and science fiction and queer romance and tragedy, thrillers and comedies and cookbooks. In this Literary Agendas book, I am going to focus on YA fiction, which in general terms is often thought to have emerged with S. E. Hinton's novel *The Outsiders*, published in 1967, when Hinton was herself eighteen. The book focuses on the conflict between two groups of teenagers—the "greasers" and the "socs" (Socials)—and is narrated by Ponyboy Curtis, a greaser and an orphan who lives with his two older brothers. Ponyboy's social and emotional struggles became paradigmatic for the first wave of YA fiction, which purported to be realistic portrayals of tensions that had long been brewing in US society.[1] This novel also popularized the image of the misfit on the margins—Ponyboy is a less privileged and cynical version of Holden Caulfield, the hero of Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951). Salinger's book was originally intended for adult readers and became more of a "teen classic" in the aftermath of *The Outsiders* and others. In the first decades after Hinton's novel, the category of "YA" primarily designated fiction that focused on characters between the ages of twelve and eighteen. As Michael Cart points out in a 2008 essay for the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA),

> between 1990 and 2000 the number of persons between 12 and 19 soared to 32 million, a growth rate of seventeen percent that significantly outpaced the growth of the rest of the population. The size of this population segment has also increased as the conventional definition of "young adult" has expanded to

> include those as young as ten and, since the late 1990s, as old as twenty-five.
>
> (2008 np)

Cart, who has been a long-time advocate for YA literature, also notes that YA now spans all genres and forms.

Further blurring the category of YA is the fact that the readership is often more "A" than "Y." Perhaps freed by the popularity of the *Harry Potter* series, adults are eager consumers of what is considered YA fiction. Rachel Falconer uses the term "crossover fiction" to describe this mixed readership, which she suggests we see as an indication that "children's literature has never existed in a truly separate sphere . . . [because] an essential feature of this category of fiction is that its boundaries are unfixed" (9). Those unfixed boundaries may explain why *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007), had bigger sales for the adult editions than for the children's editions (Falconer 16). Adults, it would seem, not only do most of the writing of YA, but they are also involved at the business end of the publishing process, and at the purchasing end, buying for themselves almost as frequently as they buy for the teenaged readers in their lives. I imagine that adults will be the readers of this book, a fact that further illustrates the blurriness of categorization. Even if adults aren't reading YA for their own pleasure, they are intimately involved in its production.

Unlike, for example, "detective fiction," "YA literature" is at once a designation of content and audience—an audience that is always in the midst of transforming. We have all been teenagers; we have not all been detectives. We can remember ourselves as teenaged readers, the utter immersion with which we used to sink into a story, an experience that hovers, ghost-like, when or if we return to those books as adults. The books become a mirror not only of the moment when they were written but also of where and who we were when we first read them. Because we read these books when we are young (or younger than you are now, presumably, as you read this book), our reading experiences are often more intense, unmediated. The reading is not necessarily "innocent," but it may be, perhaps, unaware of the book's reviews or the author's politics. Philip Pullman suggests that young readers are an exacting audience, even if they might not be "sophisticated" in an adult sense: "in a book for children you can't put the plot on hold

while you posture artistically . . . . [These readers] have more important things in mind than your dazzling skill" (qtd. in Falconer 5). When teenagers engage with fiction (unless they're reading a book for school and thus probably for some kind of an exam, which we might think of as "transactional reading"– reading for a purpose and information rather than pleasure), they can be thought of as "lay readers," people whose reading "proffers the possibility of reconnecting with the everyday life of literary engagement" (Buurma and Heffernan 115). Unlike literary scholars—scholars writing for other scholars—for whom the stereotype of a hermetically sealed discourse is often all too accurate, teenagers see themselves and their worlds in the texts; their reading becomes, as Eric Shouse describes it, "a non-conscious experience of intensity . . . of unformed and unstructured potential" (Shouse qtd. in Anker and Felski 175). I want to focus on the word "potential" here, because that's one of the key factors that makes YA literature so important: The readership of YA is one of *potential*. These are readers who do not yet hold any of the official levers of power and who exist, in a sense, on the margins of their societies by reason of their age. Many of them are additionally marginalized by reason of sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, economics, or religion. What I see in YA literature are the ways that the texts render the experience of being sidelined and then offer examples of how readers might imagine themselves as people with agency in the world. We see characters who discover the ability to engage with and sometimes even improve the worlds in which they live. I suppose some would say that it is naïve to think that fiction can change the world, and perhaps that's true. But people can change the world—and books can change people.

Fiction allows us to inhabit lives that are not our own: When we read, we are inside lives and consciousnesses that may be quite different from our daily experiences. As we read, we do not erase differences between ourselves and the protagonists; instead, we find moments of connection and resonance that enable us to bridge those differences, like my Korean American student did in reading *Akata Witch*. Reading about Sunny Nwazue's experiences on the margins gave the student insight and language with which to think about her own life: Connections were established across difference. Although she didn't name it as such, the student had engaged with what I will be calling in this book a cosmopolitan reading practice, which necessitates a willingness

to engage, to move away from what is comfortable or familiar. Fiction, as the American philosopher Martha Nussbaum says, is what develops "the compassionate imagination, which can make other people's lives more than distant abstractions" (np). It is in abstraction that the threatening Other—the migrant, immigrant, slave—becomes a monster. In *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (1996), Jeffrey Jerome Cohen stipulates that "the monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy (ataractic or incendiary), giving them life and an uncanny independence. The monstrous body is pure culture" (4). The monstrous body is a site of ambivalence, in other words, and as such provides the opportunity for negotiation and innovation. In all the novels that I discuss in this book, monsters are at the center, as is the importance of finding different ways of engaging with the monster. What we see, ultimately, is that the very definition of "monster" is being challenged: The monster becomes less about Otherness and more about those individuals and entities that see the planet and its inhabitants solely as commodities. Once we know how to see them, these monsters of commodification—the monsters that threaten the health of the planet—can be found across genres, and not only in the speculative fictions that I discuss here.

This process of engagement is essential to cosmopolitanism, a word that is never used in these novels but is illustrated by them nonetheless. Cosmopolitanism is a term that has been much theorized over the past few decades, although very rarely in the context of children's literature. I want to stress that cosmopolitanism as I see it is a *practice*, something that one does—in reading, in conversation, in the classroom.[2] Originally developed as a response to nationalism, cosmopolitanism offered models for thinking about a global conception of citizenship and in its simplest iteration sees difference as an opportunity rather than a threat. Cosmopolitanism asks us to consider our obligation to others, beyond the ties of family or state. In his seminal book *Cosmopolitanism* (2006), Kwame Anthony Appiah points out that

> people are different, the cosmopolitan knows, and there is much to learn from our differences. Because there are so many human possibilities worth exploring, we neither expect nor desire that every person or every society should converge on a single mode

> of life. Whatever our obligations are to others (or theirs to us) they often have the right to go their own way.
>
> (xv)

It is important to note that this acceptance of difference may be more difficult than it seems: "cosmopolitanism is the name not of the solution but of the challenge" (xv). How do we put into practice the attitudes that will allow us to find common cause with those who may not share our perspectives or our particular context? How do we put aside those structures of fear that so often (and so easily) preclude engagement? When we find these moments of disgust, discomfort, disindentification, can we nevertheless resist the impulse to isolate ourselves from that discomfort? Appiah suggests that perhaps we may be more naturally cosmopolitan than we know: "Cultural purity is an oxymoron. The odds are that, culturally speaking, you already live a cosmopolitan life, enriched by literature, art, and film that come from many places, and that contains influences from many more" (*Cosmopolitanism* 113). Intellectually, we may agree with Appiah's assessment about our cosmopolitan lives, but we need only to glance at the news to see how readily people rally around ideas (however chimerical) of cultural purity and authenticity, with the belief that this ostensible purity confers some sort of cultural power and authority. An essential aspect of cosmopolitan practice—and one that rarely emerges in fundamentalist rhetoric—is the acceptance of fallibilism, the willingness to see knowledge as something that evolves over time and through encounters with ideas and attitudes different than one's own. Fallibilism requires us to step back from our certainties and be open to alternatives.

I do not mean to suggest that YA fiction offers some kind of cure for fundamentalist certainties or that there aren't reactionary YA novels that bolster fear of the Other, but I do think that we want to keep in mind that YA is for a readership of potential citizens—people who have not yet, we hope, calcified into rigidity. In art—reading, film, music, maybe even TikTok memes, if my children are to be believed—we can encounter things that nudge us toward new structures of feeling. The phrase comes from Raymond Williams, who references it in several different texts, perhaps most notably in *Marxism and Literature* (1977). In its most general terms, the phrase refers to the

ways that lived experiences may vary from society's conventional narratives and expectations; that is to say, often our feelings change well before social norms and laws. And it is often in response to encounters with art that these changes begin. In *Preface to a Film*, Williams writes:

> [T]he new generation responds in its own ways to the unique world it is inheriting, taking up many continuities, that can be traced, and reproducing many aspects of the organization, which can be separately described, yet feeling its whole life in certain ways differently, and shaping its creative response into a new structure of feeling.
>
> (49)

YA fiction, I suggest, often provides the occasion for the sorts of encounters that can produce changes in structures of feeling.

YA readerships exist on the margins of their communities, and YA fiction, in turn, can demonstrate ways in which agency, community, and progressive movement can be found along the liminal edges of society. The concept of cultural purity, against which Appiah approvingly positions "contamination," fuels the fervent drawing of boundaries that position some form of "us" against some form of "other." These boundaries exist in the belief that in homogeneity there is strength. What is illustrated in the novels that I am discussing is that communities are in fact stronger if they choose to affiliate with others, to establish common cause, despite (or perhaps because of) difference. An affiliative community can form a stronger bond than a community that is presumed to exist due to some accident of birth or location. David Hollinger uses the term "affiliation" in his discussion of solidarity, which he defines as "an experience of willed affiliation" (24). "How much," he asks, "do we owe 'to our own kind'—whatever that may mean—and how much to 'strangers,' the rest of humankind?" (23).[3] The YA fiction that I discuss in this book offers responses to this question—and extends the question of obligation beyond the human to the nonhuman and the planet itself.

The work of this project could be seen, in fact, as a way to talk about YA literature that brings it into the center of a conversation not only about the cosmopolitan power of reading, but also about reading with, as Rita Felski puts it, "hopes for a less cynical and

disenchanted future" (*Hooked* viii). Both YA and cosmopolitanism exist in many different iterations, from the realist drama in books like John Green's *Turtles All the Way Down* (2017) to Gene Yuen Lang's two-volume graphic novel about the Boxer Rebellion, *Boxers and Saints* (2013), to Jacqueline Woodson's ode to friendship and Tupac Shakur, *After Tupac and D Foster* (2008). Cosmopolitanism as a concept goes back to the Stoics, but more recently has encompassed not only Appiah's well-known commentary, but also concepts of cosmofeminism, as defined by Carol Breckenridge et al. in their book *Cosmopolitanism* (2002); Ursula Heise's eco-cosmopolitanism, proposed in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* (2008); and Rosi Braidotti's conceptions of nomadism, conceptualized in any number of essays, but collected in *Nomadic Theory* (2011). To bring YA and cosmopolitanism together thus almost seems like those old choose-your-own-adventure stories, in which different results could be created by flipping to different pages in the book. Instead of asking readers to flip back and forth between chapters, what I have done instead is assemble a selection of speculative YA novels—a category in which I include the *Harry Potter* series—in order to discuss how this fiction addresses some of the pressing issues of the past quarter-century: xenophobia, racism, nationalism, and the climate crisis. I operate from the assumption that *all* fiction, if read well, asks us to contemplate our lives and the structures of feeling that we use to organize those lives.

I am using speculative YA fiction for my case studies because, as Sarah K. Cantrell writes, speculative fiction "makes us more attuned to the world . . . [w]e are invited to imagine new worlds in order to better take care of this one" (235). While it may seem counterintuitive, the dystopian landscapes of these novels actually provide landscapes of (mild) optimism, if we are willing to realign our modes of engagement with our communities and with the planet. The radical explorations envisioned in these novels may in fact reach a wider audience precisely because they are both "YA" and "speculative," and may perhaps be read by those who might otherwise be resistant to cosmopolitan practices. Maria Tatar, in *Heroine with 1001 Faces* (2021), suggests that authors of books for young audiences "tap into a rich vein of boldness and defiance, willing to accept the label of YA author [in order to] take on ambitious projects" (266). She cites Philip Pullman's comment that "some themes, some subjects, [are] too large for adult fiction;' they can

only be dealt with adequately in a children's book" (qtd. in Tatar 266). Speculative YA fiction, in all its manifestations, becomes an important facet of how Philip Davis, in the remit for this 'Literary Agenda' series, describes the power of the literary more generally: It "makes available much of human life that would not otherwise be existent to thought or recognizable as knowledge." As the editors of *The Rhetorical Power of Children's Literature* point out, "adolescent literature makes significant contributions to the world of ideas in ways that are similar to philosophical treatises and other forms of scholarly literature" (132). One of the most significant contributions made by the novels I discuss here has to do with how they reimagine human relationships to the planet, thus offering commentary (and perhaps even a modicum of hope) about environmental disaster. These books ask us to imagine our species as nodes on a network rather than rulers at the top of a resource pyramid.

These speculative novels can be seen as exemplary texts within the larger category of YA literature, not only because they deal with young people on the margins of their societies (or what's left of their societies), but also because of their engagement with the climate crisis. In the opening pages of *The Great Derangement* (2016), Amitav Ghosh writes,

> [I]f the urgency of a subject were indeed a criterion of its seriousness, then, considering what climate change actually portends for the future of the earth, it should surely follow that this would be the principal preoccupation of writers the world over—and this, I think, is very far from being the case.
>
> (np)

Ghosh looks for evidence of this principal preoccupation in places like *The New York Times Book Review*, the *London Review of Books*, and so forth, but discovers that when climate change comes up as a subject, it is in the context of nonfiction:

> [N]ovels and short stories are very rarely to be glimpsed within this horizon. Indeed, it could even be said that fiction that deals with climate change is almost by definition not of the kind that is taken seriously by serious literary journals: the mere mention of the subject is often enough to relegate a novel or a short story to the genre of science fiction. It is as though in

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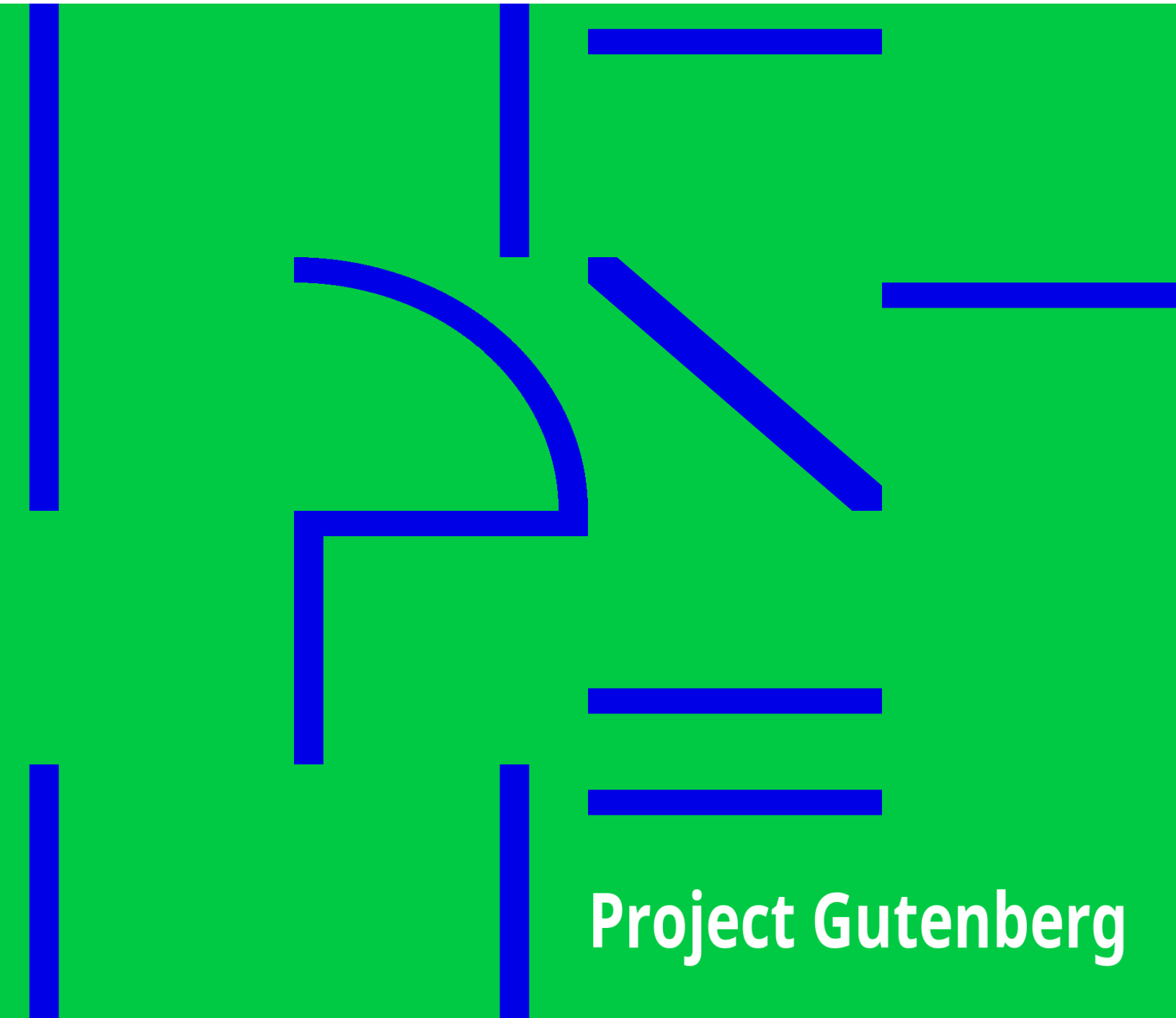
# Exploring the Variety of Random Documents with Different Content

# The Time of the End

Edward Hoare



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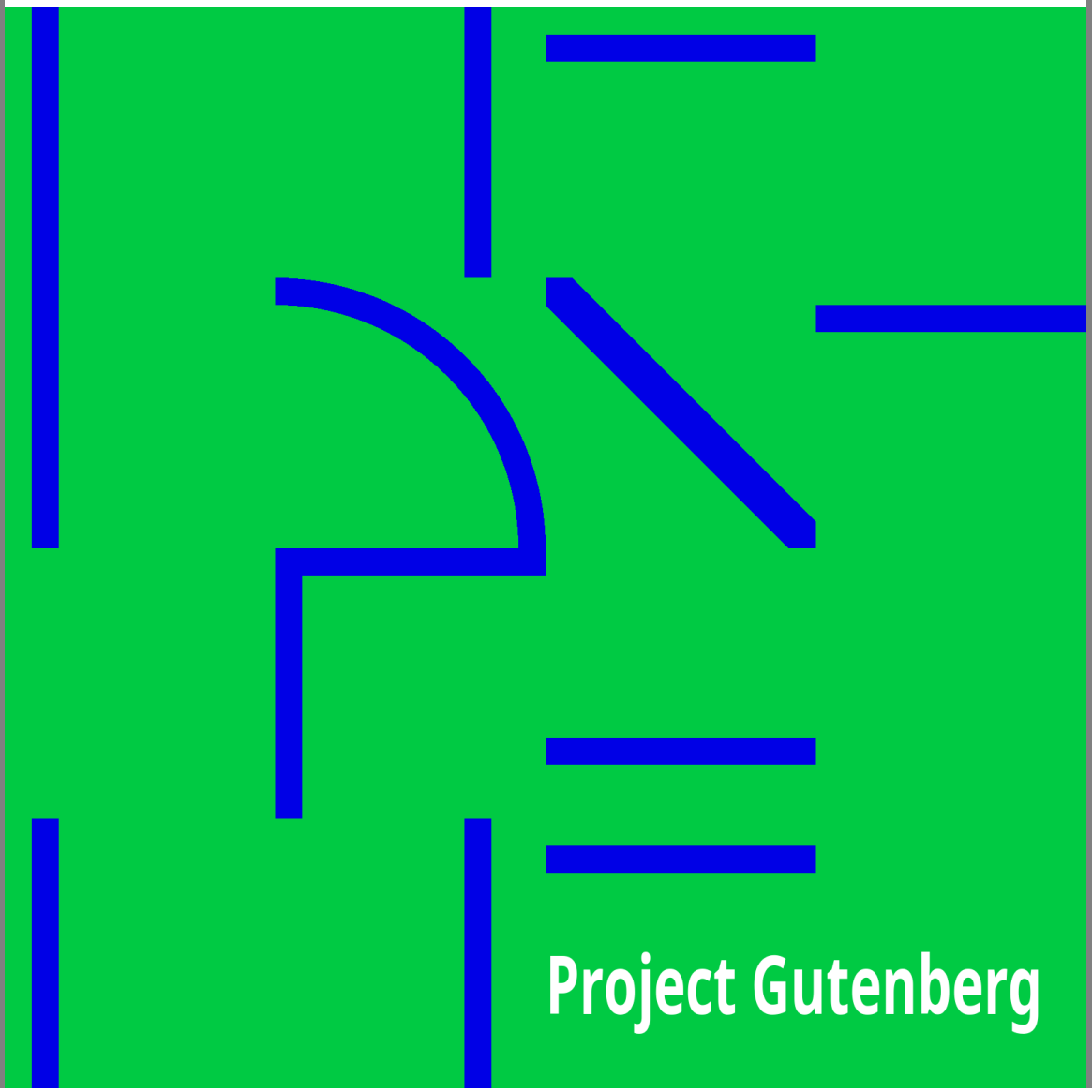

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# THE
# TIME OF THE END;

OR,

THE WORLD, THE VISIBLE CHURCH, AND
THE PEOPLE OF GOD,
AT
THE ADVENT OF THE LORD.

BY THE
**REV. EDWARD HOARE, A.M.**
CURATE OF RICHMOND.

**LONDON:**
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1846.

**BY THE SAME AUTHOR.**

SERMONS ON THE SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES
OF OUR PROTESTANT CHURCH.—PRICE 2*s.*

**Richmond:**
PRINTED BY W. OFFORD,
BREWER'S LANE.

**TO THE**

# PARISHIONERS

**OF**

# RICHMOND, SURREY.

THE following Lectures on the World, the Visible Church, and the People of God, contain the substance of three Sermons preached in the Advent season of last year. They were written, and even committed to the press with the full expectation that our happy connexion would long remain unbroken. But it has pleased God to open before me another sphere of labour, which I have thought it right to undertake; and you must now receive this little volume as a parting memorial from one who can never cease to take the deepest interest in your welfare.

I should have preferred leaving with you something more characteristic of the general tenour of my ministry; something containing fuller statements upon the grand saving doctrines of the Gospel, such as the completeness of the atonement, the present, free, and perfect justification of every poor sinner that believes in Jesus; and the new birth as wrought by the Holy Ghost in the soul, and invariably accompanied by the fruits of the Spirit in the life. These are the truths which I hope have filled my sermons, and which I pray God may be written indelibly by the Holy Ghost upon your hearts.

But I trust the subject of this little volume may not be altogether ill-suited to our present circumstances, inasmuch as by directing us to

the church's dangers, it may lead us to pray for the church's safety. If the view taken of St. Paul's prophecy be correct, we live in times of peculiar peril, and must be prepared for a further increase of seduction and apostacy within the visible church. How earnest then should be the prayers of God's people, in behalf of God's ambassadors! He alone can make us able ministers of the New Testament; He alone can preserve us as faithful witnesses for Christ. I know well, brethren, that you have prayed habitually for me, and for that assurance I most heartily thank both God and you. And now I leave it with you as my earnest and solemn charge, that you will not relax those prayers, but increase and multiply them in behalf of him who is about to fill my place. Let his hands be strengthened by the believing intercessions of a faithful flock; let him go into your pulpit borne up by prayer. And may the God of all grace shower down both on you and him every rich blessing of his Spirit! May we hear the glad tidings of your undivided fellowship in the Gospel! And may an abundant answer be given to my unworthy though unceasing supplication, "that your hearts may be comforted, being knit together in love, unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ!"

EDWARD HOARE.

*Richmond*,
*Feb.* 1846.

# LECTURE I.

"BEHOLD I come quickly," was the last promise, "Even so come, Lord Jesus," the last prayer, in Scripture. The glorious prospect of this quick return was the constant joy of the Apostles and early disciples of our Lord. Nor can any thing be more marked than the contrast between our thoughts and theirs, in reference to this important subject. They were for ever anticipating the time, and falling into error through their eager haste for the coming kingdom; we are too prone to stave off the thought of it, as a thing distant and uncertain. They could not rest without an eager inquiry as to the times and seasons of his approach; we, on the other hand, are tempted to sit still in listless apathy, with the eye blinded to the facts of history, with the ear deaf to the voice of prophecy, and so regardless of the knowledge really given us by God. They lived at the outset of the church's pilgrimage, with a distance of at least 1,800 years between them and their joyous hope; and yet they most eagerly inquired, "When shall these things be?" We live on the very verge of its conclusion, with the great climax full in view; yet we go on as if the world were to last for ever, steeped in apathy the most profound, with reference alike to the event itself and to its times.

This indifference has arisen, in some measure, from a certain vague expectation of some undefined changes that are expected to precede the advent. There is a general idea afloat that there will be some notice of the glorious day; and even thinking persons look for the universal conversion of the world before the present dispensation can be brought to a close. In other cases, the mind instinctively shelters itself behind the sameness and uniformity in the

order of society. No man doubts that, at the time appointed, the sun will rise to-morrow, for the simple reason that, day after day, it has risen hitherto with exact and unvarying punctuality. On the same principle, the continuance of the world's order deadens the expectation of a change. Society remains unaltered in its leading features: pleasure, trade, and politics, retain their hold on the public mind. The father's interests engross the son; and the natural inference is, that things will continue to move on as heretofore, and that there is little either to be hoped or dreaded in the prophetic promise of the Lord's return.

Believers therefore should study well those portions of prophecy which describe the state of the world preparatory to our Lord's return. All witnesses for Christ should be acquainted with the forerunners of his coming. Those who watch for him should know the signs of his appearing. In studying these signs there are three great classes which naturally come under review, the world, the visible church, and the chosen saints of God. Into each of these, if the Lord permit, we will examine separately. And may He, who alone "teacheth us to profit," so pour forth his Spirit, both on the writer and the reader, that all may be "led into the love of God, and the patient waiting for Christ!"

## THE WORLD.

IN what condition will our Lord find society at his coming? What will be the spirit of the age? and what its habits and occupations when Christ appears to reign? This is our first question; and it is quite impossible to over-estimate its importance.

I. There will be *no stop to men's pleasures* before the advent. There will be no startling announcement which will prevail to check the pleasure hunters. They will be found pursuing their giddy course just as at present: they will not find their souls solemnized in anticipation of the great event: the nearness of the advent will not suffice to bring on repentance: if they are not subdued by the cross

of Christ, they will not be by the prospect of his appearing. The great machinery of God's providence will move on without their perceiving it: the signal will be already given, the angelic hosts already on the wing, and the door of grace already closed, before there are any such startling appearances before the world as shall arouse the mere pleasure hunter from his dreams. Our Lord teaches this in Matthew, xxiv. 37–39.—"As the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not, until the flood came and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." Noah's preaching was the only notice of the coming flood. The world pursued its own course until the very day that the rain began to fall. On the evening before they were feasting joyously, perhaps scoffingly at the toilsome labours of the man of God; many doubtless laughing at the ark; when, unexpectedly, without further notice, in the midst of their festivity, the storm gathered, the door was closed, and the unbelieving world overwhelmed in judgment. "So," saith the Lord, "shall be the coming of the Son of man."

II. *Nor will there he any stop to business*.

The same passage from St. Matthew describes a state of active employment in the world:—"Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left." (xxiv. 40, 41). The men in the field and the women at the mill represent society as engaged in their daily callings. Nor is this description confined to the unconverted only; it includes both characters. Of the two men in the field one shall he taken, *i.e.* caught up to be with Christ as a believer; one shall be left, *i.e.* to perish as an unbeliever in the world: of the two women one shall be taken as a saint of God; one shall be left as a guilty subject of his wrath. The word here rendered "*taken*" is the same as was employed by our Lord when he

said "I will come again and *receive* you unto myself;" and therefore all that are "taken" are chosen saints of God. Believers, therefore, and unbelievers, will go out on that very morning to their business. The streets, as usual, will be full, the shops open, trade flourishing; the accountant will be found at his desk, the merchant in his counting house, the tradesman in his shop, the judge on the bench, the lawyer at the bar, the statesman in his cabinet, and the children in the school. Nor will there be any check on their society. There will be the dinner party, the friendly intercourse of those who love the things of God, and the empty frivolities of those who live in pleasure. Men will have their balls, operas, and theatres, to the very last; they will dance on to the very morning of the resurrection. There will be no change in the habits of society, no alteration in the ordinary aspect of the world; we shall be living together in social life just as at present, with business, cares, and social duties; when suddenly—in a moment—in the twinkling of an eye—the whole shall be stopped by one shrill blast of the trump of God; and some rejoicing, some trembling, some singing hymns of joy, and some gnashing their teeth for woe, we shall be summoned before the Son of man.

These are features in the general aspect of society, which only show that there is nothing to prevent the immediate appearance of our Lord. But they do not belong exclusively to any period. For the last eighteen hundred years men have been "eating and drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage;" and, as far as these points are concerned, they may apply as well to any other time as ours. There are however other signs given, which tend rather especially to mark our own times as approaching closely to the latter days. Take for example the prophecy of Daniel, which teaches,

III. That, just before the advent, there shall be *an increase of science and travelling*. Daniel, xii. 4.—"But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased." These

words plainly refer to the latter days; not to the end itself, but to "the time of the end;" to the last period. Now, of this period there are two things predicted to the Prophet; the one religious, the other social; the religious change is the unsealing of the vision, or the opening of the eyes of believers to truths hitherto concealed in prophecy; the social change is the rapid progress of travelling and science throughout the world. It is the latter of these with which we are now concerned. At the time of the end, therefore, there is to be an increase of knowledge and of men running to and fro on the earth. Now, ask any common observer of mankind, one who looks on life without reference to prophecy or religion; ask him what he thinks the most remarkable feature in the present aspect of society, and he will tell you the rapid advance of science and increased facility of communication. Just contrast the world at large, in respect of *travelling*, with what it was fifty years ago. Most truly may it be said, "Men are running to and fro on the earth." The leading commercial feature of the day is railway speculation; the habits of society are becoming materially changed through the ease and rapidity with which we travel. Thousands and tens of thousands have now become travellers, who, a few years since, had scarcely quitted the immediate neighbourhood of their native town. Nor is this confined to England. It is the same with America, Russia, India, and the whole continent of Europe. Look again at *science*, at the vast improvements in machinery, at the curious discoveries in every department of useful art, at the rapid increase of knowledge throughout the world. Look again at *the connexion* between the two. The increase of travelling is foretold by the Prophet in connexion with the advance of science. "Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased." But in Daniel's day there could appear no such connexion. The increase of knowledge could give no speed to the heavy motions of the camel. This connexion is a discovery of the last twenty or thirty years. The prophecy lay dormant for twenty-four centuries, when a new order of things sprang up amongst us; the connexion foretold in Daniel's prophecy broke in upon the minds of men of science, and the immediate effect has been, that increased knowledge and increased travelling

are going hand in hand throughout the world. Now I do not mean to strain this too far, or to represent it as a sign of the immediate approach of our Lord. It may be merely the commencement of a new era; "the time of the end" may be only dawning upon the world. But thus much we may safely say, that there has already been sufficient change in these two respects to satisfy the prophecy; that; if the coming were to be to-morrow, there is enough to convince the most hardened infidel, that Daniel's words have received a literal, complete, and most remarkable, fulfilment. In this respect, therefore, the world is ready for the advent.

IV. There is reason to believe from the prophetic Scriptures that *the nations of Europe will be the first nations of the world at the time of our Lord's return*.

It is curious to observe in history the rise and fall of the various nations which have successively occupied the foremost position in society. Like the gleam of sunshine on the landscape, civilization and power have beamed for a while upon successive kingdoms, and then left them to be obscured and darkened by the cloud. Thus Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome, have successively swayed the sceptre of the world. This sceptre is now held by the European nations generally. The power is perhaps greater than in any former age; but there is this great difference, that now it is possessed by no nation singly, but divided amongst several. In former days, the Roman republic was itself sovereign and supreme; there was no other which could pretend to rivalry. It is not so now; there may be proud pretensions to national superiority; but all have the advantage of unquestionable superiority over the uncivilized nations of Africa and the East. Such changes are inexplicable on merely worldly principles: there is nothing in nature to explain this rise and fall of moral light. The student of history may endeavour to trace the causes of a nation's gradual decline; but, why those causes themselves appeared is a question which no natural intellect can solve. The student of prophecy, however, is not left in darkness. He

knows not why it is that an all-wise God has so ordered it, but he sees in all these changes the exact completion of God's prophetic Scriptures, and at once solves the mystery by referring the whole to the revealed purpose of an all-wise and all-controlling God. In two separate visions these changes were all foretold by Daniel. As history says there have been, so prophecy foretold there should be, four ruling kingdoms in the world. We are taught this by the vision of the image and its explanation in Daniel, ii. 31–45; and by the vision of the four beasts, in Dan. vii. [17] From both we gather the same leading facts. (1.) That Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome should, in turn, succeed to the supremacy of empires held by Babylon at the time of the Prophet. (2.) That the fourth, or Roman empire, should appear under a two-fold aspect, at first being united like the foot, but afterwards divided like the toes. (3.) That this fourth empire should be the last; that there should be no fifth arising to supersede it; for that in the time of the ten kings, its second or divided period, should arise the kingdom of the Son of man. Dan. ii. 44.—"And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever." Now, as to the two first facts, there is an exact correspondence between history and prophecy. As was foretold, Persia succeeded Babylon, Greece Persia, and Rome Greece. The Roman power again has appeared under a two-fold form, first being united under the republic and the empire, and then breaking up into the kingdoms of modern Europe. The prophecy, therefore, by its two first facts, brings the history of the world's kingdoms down to our own exact position, and at the same time it teaches, by the third, that there can be no further change before the advent. "In the days of these kings," *i.e.* the European nations, "shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom," *i.e.* the kingdom of the saints, of the Son of man in glory. With reference, therefore, to the political changes of the world, we are living under the last period of the last empire. There is to be no further shifting

of the seat of power: strength and civilization will be found resting with Europe when the Son of man appears.

V. There is however one feature of society before the advent of which the same cannot be said; one class of prophecies which do not yet appear to have received their full accomplishment, *viz.* those which predict a *state of war and tribulation*.

We are taught by our Lord (Matthew, xxiv. 21, 22) that the time of the end shall be one of peculiar distress: "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." The passage may have a primary and typical reference to the destruction of Jerusalem; but that this reference is not exclusive appears plainly from *vv.* 29 & 30: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken; and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven." The tribulation of those days is here described as the last event on earth before the advent. So again in Luke, xvii. 33:—"Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it." The passage refers to "the day when the Son of man is revealed," *v.* 30; and the words quoted show that the state of things will be of such a character as to involve the risk of martyrdom in the faithful confession of the truth. But the words of Daniel are more explicit still. "And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some

to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever. But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased;" Daniel, xii. 1–4. There can be no doubt as to the time here referred to: it is determined by four indisputable marks. The final deliverance of God's chosen people; the resurrection; the glory of the saints; and the title given to it, "the time of the end." Nor can there be any doubt as to the fact predicted. "There shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time."

The words of our Lord again teach us that the commencement of these sorrows shall be war. "And ye shall hear of wars, and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines and pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows;" Matt, xxiv. 6–8. So the great crisis is described in the Revelation, as "*the battle* of Almighty God;" Rev. xvi. 14. But we are now at peace, nor is there at present any open combination of the ruling powers against the truth. Believers may have their hearts grieved by the national support of error, and here and there may be the outbreak of a persecuting spirit; but there is nothing yet of a great tribulation, nothing approaching to the fiery trial foretold in Daniel's awful prophecy. All this is to come: how soon God only knows. Persecution is now condemned, but the last ten years have witnessed a wonderful political revolution in Rome's favour; and it may be amply proved from facts as well as documents that she only waits the favouring day of power, to develope her old character, and make herself drunk in the life-blood of the saints. We are still at peace: but we heard last year of the cloud in the West, who shall say how soon the storm may gather, and burst in a thunder-clap over our heads? Europe is still at peace; but surely the mine is ready, the train is laid, and it needs but the death of one

aged sovereign to produce an explosion which may convulse the very foundations of society. Then increased science will only produce unknown horrors, nor does it need any stretch of a lively imagination to foresee the onset of such days as those described by our Lord, when he said, "Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be."

For such a period believers should be ready. Every living man will be swept away by the flood, except the little, blessed, band, who have a fast "hold upon the anchor of the soul sure and stedfast, and that entereth into that within the veil." Nothing then will stand but the strong reality of a living union with Jesus. Well, therefore, has the voice gone forth as the precursor of the conflict, "Behold I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame;" Rev. xvi. 15.

But, in what attitude shall society be found?

VI. According to the Scriptures, there shall be *a general indifference to the subject of his return*.

Of course, amongst the people of God, there will be many whose hearts God has led to the patient waiting for Christ. Some, in the fervour of an ardent hope, may carry their longings into enthusiasm; and others, in the calm sobriety of a Scriptural faith, like Simeon and Anna, will abide waiting for their Lord. But such cases will be the exception. The great mass of men will be altogether indifferent. They will care no more for our preaching than the men before the flood did for Noah's: they will think it an idle and enthusiastic tale, and utterly disregard the whole matter.

Some indeed will scoff at it. They will challenge believers to the proof of it; they will point to the world's unbroken course, and say "Where is the promise of his coming?" They will be ready to raise the sneer against the church's hopes, and only notice the blessed

tidings just to scoff at them as idle speculation. "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation;" 2 Pet. iii. 3 & 4.

But this scoffing spirit is not described as the general feature of society. It requires some attention even to scoff at God's promises. But the general character of the world with reference to this great subject will be apathy; downright, dogged, indifference to the whole concern. Thus, in the parable of the talents, "they all slumbered and slept." The wise virgins could sleep in calm peace, for they were ready; the foolish virgins could slumber only in apathy, for, being unprepared, they could only wake to perish. Thus our Lord says he "will come as a thief in the night," when none give the thing a thought. The watchman may cry the hour, but the sleeper sleeps: he may sound the note of warning, but the sleeper sleeps: the thief may be within the chamber, but still he sleeps unmoved, unconscious, unprepared. Now this is the description which our Lord gives of the world before his coming. He says, men shall be found sleeping, a few blessed servants watching, but the mass sleeping, unconscious of his approach, unconcerned at his promises, unawakened even by the judgments that hurry on as the forerunners of his wrath.

The message then for the day is, "Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." It is impossible for any man of common observation to be blind to the fact that the great mass of men are still slumbering before God. Quick and energetic in their business, keen in their speculations, alive and alert as to the money market, they are profoundly insensible to the coming. They are content to leave the great point unsettled. They are hurrying before the judgment seat, and have not yet bowed before the cross. They are shortly to stand before the judge, and for aught they know, the whole weight of God's curse still hangs over their unforgiven sin. There is no fellowship with a Saviour, no

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